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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: INTERLOCUTORS MOURN BALASINGHAM AS
LTTE'S VOICE OF MODERATION

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Embassy's Tamil contacts, international observers and Sri Lankan political figures lamented the December 14 death in London of chief LTTE negotiator and theoretician Anton Balasingham (1938-2006). Members of Colombo's humanitarian and think-tank community stressed that Balasingham had been a moderate voice within the LTTE. Balasingham, who joined the nascent LTTE in 1972, reportedly supported a federal solution with maximum devolution for the pre-dominantly Tamil North and East rather than Tiger supremo Prabhakaran's separate Tamil state, according to LTTE-breakaway leader and former peace delegation member Karuna Amman. However, Prabhakaran never gave Balasingham full freedom to negotiate. End Summary.

Close Friendship Between
Prabhakaran, Balasingham

12. (C) Contacts from all over the political spectrum lamented the December 14 death in London of chief LTTE negotiator and theoretician Anton Balasingham (1938-2006). Balasingham, a British citizen married to an Australian, headed the LTTE delegation in all peace negotiations with the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) from Thimpu in 1985 until Geneva I in February 2006. Balasingham did not participate, however in the failed Geneva II talks in October 2006 due to his failing health. Pro-LTTE senior Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Member of Parliament for Trincomalee R. Sampantham told Pol FSN: "Balasingham understood the dimensions of the Tamil question. He was close to Prabhakaran and had his full trust. He was able to discuss matters freely with Prabhakaran and influence his thinking." Sampantham added that: "Balasingham's death won't impact the negotiating process, because it is up to the GSL to come up with solutions for basic Tamil aspirations."

13. (C) In a eulogy for Balasingham on the pro-LTTE website, Prabhakaran described the late negotiator as his "best friend" and confidant against "tribulations and anxieties." However, the personal closeness between the two did not translate into ideological consistency. Prabhakaran, a self-taught military tactician, respected Balasingham as a thinker and, especially, as a writer of Tiger propaganda tracts, but was not much influenced by Balasingham's academic brand of Marxism.

Proponent of a Federal Solution?

¶4. (U) On the other hand, Balasingham supported a federal solution with maximum devolution for the predominantly Tamil North and East rather than Prabhakaran's separate Tamil state, according to LTTE-breakaway leader and former peace delegation member Karuna Amman. In an interview published December 15 in the independent Daily Mirror newspaper, Karuna said that Balasingham was the only top LTTE leader committed to a federal solution, adding: "Prabhakaran wanted to drag out the peace process for five years during which time we could rearm. Anton Balasingham was the only one who didn't agree, but Prabhakaran didn't allow him to make independent decisions." Karuna reported that Balasingham's trips to LTTE-controlled territory became shorter over the years because of heated arguments with Prabhakaran about the peace process.

Human Rights Community
Laments Loss of Moderate Voice

¶5. (C) Jeevan Thiagarajah, Executive Director of the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) and chairman of the Institute for Human Rights told Pol FSN on December 15: "Balasingham's demise weakens the voice of moderation and negotiation for the LTTE. In view of his long association with Prabhakaran, he was able to persuade the LTTE leader on many matters. For example, the decision to pursue federalism in the Oslo peace talks was Balasingham's." BBC Sinhala editor Priyanth Liyanage called Balasingham "a moderating force within the Tamil Tigers." Tyrell Ferdinands, Director of the Initiative for Policy and Conflict Transformation,

COLOMBO 00002084 002 OF 002

told us: "Balasingham was a rare personality, dominating and blunt: Prabhakaran trusted him absolutely, even on an emotional level. He occasionally changed Prabhakaran's mind. His death signals the changing of the guard, of which we saw the first signs at Geneva II when S.P. Tamilselvan led the LTTE delegation. We saw a new Tamilselvan, who performed and proved himself well. We may see a new dynamism within the negotiating team, with collective views rather than the domination of one personality."

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Anton Balasingham was for years the "friendly face" of the Tamil Tigers. A Ph.D. from London, he penned long academic analyses of Tamil political aspirations, in addition to leading the LTTE negotiating team. It is likely that he was, in fact, more pragmatic than the LTTE leadership in Sri Lanka, and did understand a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka would be the only possibility for the Tamils. However, his absence from the negotiating table is unlikely to change the course of the ethnic conflict in the immediate future. Prabhakaran, the violent extremist, is still calling the shots, and his is the only opinion that matters for the Tigers.

BLAKE